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Spin doctoring In Andhra Pradesh

Monitoring of two newspapers -- Eenadu and Sakshi -- provides documentation of how single-mindedly the Congress party is using its chief minister's family newspaper to tarnish the TDP's Naidu. C S H N MURTHY details his findings. CSHN Murthy

Posted Wednesday, Jun 11 13:55:08, 2008

A new newspaper *Sakshi* (launched on March 24, 2008) arrival on the print media scene of Andhra Pradesh has created ripples which set a new record of controversies that transcended all others in the past, not because the paper belongs to Mr. Y. Jagan Mohan Reddy, the son of present Chief Minister Dr.Y.S.Rajasekhar Reddy, but due to its strange approach to professional standards (not to be confused with *ethics of journalism as discussed by Karen Sanders**) of journalism.

First, the paper belies the popular belief that media acts as a *fourth estate* and exposes the corruption and the failures of the government. Further, any paper new or old, gives a wide coverage to a number of problems affecting the various cross sections of the society, including farmers, women, students, employees, different vocational groups, rural groups, etc. As such the Government, whoever might be in power, would be the focus area for any media. Of course a paper does not only give publicity to the government schemes programs and policies, but also criticizes it constructively and effectively as to benefit both the government and target groups.

However *Sakshi* is a paper with a difference for it has set ingenious professional standards of journalism by adopting a new set of conventions and practices which are delineated below:

Sakshi's record of sorts

1. It claimed a circulation of 12 million copies on the day of the start a claim not verified by any standard agency like ABC or IMRB or IRS or INS. (*Sakshi* #Dhanyavadaalu). Y.Jagan Mohan Reddy's note. First Page 27.03.08). It means overnight the readership in Andhra Pradesh doubled, the readership of other papers being unaffected.

2. It was perhaps the only newspaper in India, which got the Government's advertisements from all the departments from the day of the publication at par with *Eenadu* whose circulation was certified as 11 million by the ABC and IMRB and INS.

3. It was perhaps the only paper for which a GO was issued on April 3, 2008, separately by none other than Chief Minister himself, authorizing the release of the advertisements dispensing with the certification by any agency such as ABC/IMRB/INS or IRS which is a mandatory procedure stipulated by any State or Central Government under the existing laws. (*Eenadu* Page 5, 14.04.08). In the first 15 days, 8,508 sq.cms space was filled up by the advertisements released by State Directorate of Information and Public Relations.

4. It targets the opposition leader Mr. N.Chandrababu Naidu, who was rejected by the masses of the state in the elections held in 2004- lock stock and barrel. (*Sakshi* papers dt: 26/3/08, 31/3/08, 01/04/08, 03/04/08, 08/04/08, 13/04/08, 14/04/08, 17/04/08, 19/04/08, 22/04/08, 23/04/08, 24/04/08).

5. It directly attacks Mr. Ramoji Rao and Mr.Vemuri Radhakrishna by names, both being the owners and the Editors of the rival papers- *Eenadu* and *Andhra Jyoti*- and have been in existence much before *Sakshi* arrived on the scene. (*Sakshi* papers dt.: 29/03/08, 01/04/08, 05/04/08, 11/04/08, 15/04/08, 18/04/08, 19/04/08, 20/04/08).

MEDIA WATCH BRIEF

Worse than rioting

If you are still unclear about the draconian nature of Sec 66 (a) of the IT Act, here's something that'll help: Palghar police charged ten people with rioting, unlawful assembly, endangering life or personal safety of others, mischief and house-trespass (Sects 143, 147, 336, 427, 451 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) respectively) for vandalizing Dr Dhadha's hospital. Punishment for all this: three months to two years. But the young women arrested under section 66 (a), IT Act, and Sec 505 (2) of the IPC for their Facebook posts can get upto three years! Clearly, riotous acts are less dangerous than speaking out!

Contrite Katju

When Press Council Chairman Markendeya Katju questioned the intellectual calibre of media persons, it gave the Indian Newspaper Society (INS) the perfect excuse to boycott his meetings. Oddly, the normally combative Press Council chairman expressed regrets in a letter dated 21.09.2012. Now, the INS has magnanimously accepted the regrets, a press release from the society said. Perhaps Katju will rein in his criticism of media houses now, more the pity!

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MEDIA JOB OF THE WEEK

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New Business Age Pvt. Ltd., the pioneer of Economic Journalism in Nepal has been publishing New Business Age (monthly business magazine in English), Aarthik Abh

Opening at The Statesman

The Statesman needs correspondents at

6. It is the only news paper which has the luxury and privilege of being defended tooth and nail whenever opposition groups made allegations against *Sakshi* by none other than the Ministers of the State such as Mr. Raghuveera Reddy Minister of Agriculture Mr. Shabbir Ali, Minister of Electricity, Mr. Kiran Kumar Reddy the Chief Whip in the Assembly, etc. They, instead of the management, defend the news paper regarding its funds and bloated shares as investments from the reputed industrial houses such as *Lanco*, *India Cement*, *Aurobindo Pharma*--which were benefited by a series of pro-corporate decisions of Dr Rajasekhar Reddy in the last four years.

7. It claims to be objective in its reporting but the language and diction it uses in its captions are very rude and directly attack Chandra Babu Naidu ("*Janku Gonku leni Babu Bonku*" means *Unhesitating shameless Babu lies: Sakshi 17.04.08*) or Ramoji Rao (*Kota digina Ra(mo)ji* means *Ramoji's climb down: Sakshi 20.4.08*). Such a reporting style is unheard in the annals of journalism.

8. It directly meddled in marketing (distribution costs for the delivery boys and the day to day price of *Eenadu* paper) by writing stories instigating the paperboys to revolt against the low distribution costs they were paid and by demanding Mr. Ramoji Rao directly to bring down its price to two rupees for which *Sakshi* is sold ("*Good Morning, ido andamina morning*" *Sakshi 18.04.08, Sakshi 20.04.08*).

9. The paper claims to be impassionate and fearless in reporting the truth but clearly indulges in spin doctoring in favor Congress and Dr. Y.S.Rajasekhar Reddy either by eliminating any adverse reports against him or reporting such adverse reports (CAG indicting Government on misappropriation of funds meant for irrigation projects such as *Yellampalli*, etc.) with least important headlines in the inside pages innocuously. ("*Bhoo Ketayimpulapi CAG Churakalu APIIC Teeruto 304 kotla nashtam*": *Sakshi 29.03.08-first page anchor item in the right hand corner*).

The present paper therefore deals with each of the above issues in the light of new wave of professional standards this paper is likely to set in the year which is an important year for the incumbent government in view of the elections due around May 2009.

Methodology

Since March 24 2008 the date the paper was launched about 30 issues of *Sakshi* (March 24-April 23 2008) were analyzed and compared with the *Eenadu* for the same dates for their first page headlines and content. The reason that necessitates such an analysis is the claim made by both the paper management and the government that the paper enjoyed a circulation at par with the *Eenadu* and even crossed the mark within a few days of launch devoid of any teething troubles usually a new paper encounters anywhere in India.

The methodology followed is based on the guidelines and broad framework of design and planning set out by Thomas R Lindolf and Bryan C Taylor in "*Qualitative Communication Research Methods*" (2002: 66-117). For ethics in journalism, the author relied his interpretations on the basis of the interpretations offered by Karen Sanders in *Ethics and Journalism* (2003).

As for the theorization of the ideas discussed here as "spin-doctoring" the author largely relied upon the work of Professor P. Eric Louw who argued in his famous work-*the Media and the Political Process* that "objective journalism" is a fallacy and self-deception and that it is not possible for any journalist in the political reporting to be absolutely objective He has contrasted the empiricist view of a journalist with the constructivist view of the journalist in this work (2005:17) Drawing parallel between the political theories of democracies and the media processes he introduced terms called *policy impression management policy* and *hype elite-politics* and *mass politics information rich media* and *information poor media insiders* (politically active elite politicians in small groups) *semi-insiders* (People aware of elite politics and groups privy to policy decisions but not part of it) and *outsiders* (voters).

"When it comes to political reporting this is blamed on the work of spin-doctors" ie demagogues who work to prevent journalists from finding all the "facts". Spin-doctors have become a convenient scapegoat. They are viewed as practitioners of the dark arts who work to obstruct objective journalists doing their job. And there is some validity in this portrayal However this portrayal is only half the story. The other half the story is the role of journalists themselves play in constructing a view of the world more akin to the shadows in *Plato's cave* than a mirror. The book will argue that political reporting has been PR-ized, ie. spin-doctors have learned to "steer" the portrayal of the news. However PR-ization involves a symbiotic relationship between a range of people including spin-doctors public opinion pollsters politicians and *Journalists*. The practices of objective journalism are implicated in the process of obscuration because spin-doctors have learned to use the practices of mainstream liberal journalism to help them construct the view of the world they are trying to portray (2005:5).

Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Raipur and Gangtok to cover the states of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Sikkim respectively. Appl

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Is Manish Tewari a good choice for the Information and Broadcasting portfolio?

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Main Aspects of the Study

1. Direct and excessive reference to Opposition Leader Mr N Chandrababu Naidu.
2. Direct and excessive reference to Editor in Chief Mr Ramoji Rao of *Eenadu* and Editor in Chief Mr. Vemuri Radhakrishna of *Andhra Jyothi*.
3. Defense offered in support of *Sakshi* by the Ministers and the Chief Whip other than Chief Minister Dr Y.S. Raja Sekhar Reddy
4. Direct reference to some of the stories published in *Eenadu* and *Andhra Jyothi* alleging fraud corruption and collusion between government and contractors or fraudulent approach of government in the guise of pro-farmer policies, etc.
5. Avoiding direct reference (in the first page) to CAG reports/SC or HC judgments which indicted the government on its expenditure/land deals and the hikes in the budgets the government tacitly allowed favoring contractors which was published in other news papers such as *Vaarthaa*, etc.
6. Publishing stories that mislead the public deliberately (eg. TRS and TDP secret pact; Jadcherla SEZs story published in *Sakshi April 18, 2008* and later disproved by the E-TV live telecast and by a fact finding committee of civil liberties activists).

Definitions of the main terms of the study

For the purpose of the study as structured in [the main aspects of the study] the following terms have been defined as below:

Direct Reference: means the paper *suo moto* itself carries a news report under its agency head [newsline] without quoting any official of a political party or minister, etc (eg *Chandrababu Bonku*[Chandrababu Lie: *Sakshi* 17.04.08; *Nindu Sabha lo babu rubaabu*[Babu's Goondaism in Open Assembly: *Sakshi April 3, 2008*. *Kota digivacchina Ramoji*-Climb down by Ramoji etc). Neither it is akin to an investigative story. Derogatory language punched with humiliation or insinuation, rather than a deeper analysis of the subject, marks tone of the item. (*Janku Gonku leni Chandrababu Bonku, Nindu Sabha lo babu rubaabu*, etc.)

Content: i. Direct reference to individuals not to their policies or ideas or ideologies. ii. Some of these references lacked in *formal respect* usually paid to the dignitaries or industrialists iii. The *tone* and *tenor* is taken into consideration in such references construed as personal attacks.

Spin doctoring: As defined above in the methodology coining headlines and constructing sentences as to favor one and discredit some other is construed as *spin-doctoring*. Here in the given analysis *Sakshi* [spin doctoring statements favoring Congress or Dr. YSR and discrediting Chandrababu and Ramoji Rao are analyzed. These include suppression of nepotism corruption and favoritism. In fact it is through these channels the spin-doctors gain access to inside news rooms. In the present analysis spin doctors are politicians-turned investors in *Sakshi*.

Hypotheses *H1 Sakshi* sets new professional standards in *spin doctoring*.

H2 The objective or empiricist view of the world by a journalist perhaps may no longer be possible or relevant to Telugu print media or electronic media.

H3 It is easy to interpret any *headline* or *intro* today as spin doctored rather to prove it to be an objective.

H4 Ethics of Journalism hitherto known may no longer be relevant to examine the current news content reporting.

Analysis and DiscussionCirculation, Advertisements, Costs of the paper, and Spin-doctors

The newspaper[s] claim that it enjoyed a circulation figure of 12 million copies on the opening day is something stupendous and unbelievable (*Sakshi March 24, 2008, Sakshi 27.03.08*). It means overnight the readership of Andhra Pradesh doubled, the readership of the other news papers being unaffected. It would defy all known marketing strategies so far employed by reputed publishing houses such as the *Times of India*, *Indian Express* and *Eenadu*. Vanita Kohli (2003) in her book the Indian Media Business book discusses the unique strategies employed by Mr Ramoji Rao in early 1975s to outwit all other traditional newspapers such as *Andhra Patrika*, *Andhra Prabha* and *Andhra Jyothi*. Academics even teach the success story of *Eenadu* and the *Times of India* as case studies at the Post Graduate level in the University in the Advertising and Marketing paper.

Some of those strategies include a radical change in the lay out of the paper selection of appropriate fonts prioritizing the news items cartoons and photographs etc Even the language of the paper has been refreshingly new and distinct from the traditional language employed in those newspapers The timely delivery and frequent reader surveys-item-wise-had enabled the *Eenadu* to settle down with more attractive stories and heads/subheads. Further *Eenadu* has established its own marketing agencies and through which it ensured delivery across the state even in remote areas of the State where the traditional newspapers never reached on time. Though *Eenadu* had quickly taken over all other traditional newspapers it had taken several long years before it claimed the *largest circulated Telugu Daily* on its masthead a fact that was confirmed by various readership surveys such as ABC or IMRB. In fact such a certification is a prerequisite for release of advertisements from the Government or private sector side. It was *Eenadu* which later introduced several new concepts, as is the *Times of India*, such as regional bulletins, color pages, color mastheads, Sunday magazine booklets, etc which were later followed by all other news papers including traditional news papers like *Andhra Prabha*, *Andhra Patrika* and *Andhra Jyoti*. (Vanita Kohli 2003). By any comparison it cannot be said that the present format of *Sakshi* even today is better than *Eenadu*, however great Maria Garcia is.

On the contrary the Chief Minister as well as the Ministers of the Cabinet rank started claiming the circulation figures of *Sakshi* as 11 million on the floor of the assembly and even outside and to sustain these claims the government even released advertisements from the day one at par with *Eenadu* (*Eenadu April 3 2008*). The matter did not end here. To provoke Mr Ramoji Rao direct articles started appearing in *Sakshi* (*April 18 and April 20, 2008*) in the front page appealing to the paperboys of *Eenadu* to revolt against the low payments offered by *Eenadu*. Next day a success story was published in *Sakshi* stating that paperboys in the Golconda and Lunger House area revolted and refused to drop the *Eenadu* papers at such low costs of income The next day another article appeared that Mr Ramoji had a climb down of his earlier payment costs to the delivery boys and agreed to revise the distribution costs of the delivery boys The paper further demanded *Eenadu* to bring down its price from current rupees three to rupees two at the rate *Sakshi* was sold.

The reason for such a demand was however understandable. Earlier, Mr Chandrababu the former Chief Minister and the leader of Opposition on the floor of the Assembly, during the no-confidence motion moved against the Congress government, precisely raised the very issue - how could *Sakshi* a multi colored 30-page pullout be sold at rupees two? (*Avineeti Bandhu Preeti* *Eenadu April 1, 2008*). He demanded the cost break up of the production meaning that the paper is an outcome of corrupt money siphoned off from various on going irrigation projects He also cited several irregularities related to fixing of share prices even before the paper was launched and the investments into the paper by those (*Lanco, India Cements, Aurobindo Pharma Penna Cements etc*) who were largely benefited by the Government either in the form of contracts or allotment of Special Economic Zones.

Few days later, Mr. Chandrababu held a press meet and even disclosed the documentary evidence that was in his possession to show that the names and addresses of some of the investors were even fake. The TDP leaders even showed to the media the Government's new GO, released a week after the launch of the newspaper on April 3,2008, authorizing release of advertisements by the Government to *Sakshi* daily (*Eenadu April 14, 2008*). At the present cost of two rupees per copy *Sakshi* is bound to incur losses to the tune of 175 million rupees a day(calculated per day paper cost as 15 rupees and annual loss working out to a whopping 46-5 billion rupees)--in which case a number of questions pertaining to the legitimacy of the paper as a *fourth estate* (John Delane is The Editor of *The Times* and the proponent of the *fourth estate or watchdog notion*) stare deep into the face of Dr.Y.S.R and his caucus. Instead of distancing himself from the management and financial perspectives of his son's paper *Sakshi*, Dr.Y.S.R brazenly defended both the circulation figures as well as the consequences of losses He even said that it became necessary to bring out such a paper to put out stories impartially unlike *Eenadu*, *Andhra Jyoti*, *Vaartha*, etc. (*Eenadu April 3 2008*).

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